

## **POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**BILL: SB061, Division of Correction – Volunteer Services Program**

**FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender**

**POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**DATE: April 2, 2026**

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**The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on SB061.**

Senate Bill 061 seeks to establish a Volunteer Services Program (“the Program”) to provide access to formerly incarcerated individuals to State correctional facilities in order to assist currently incarcerated individuals with release preparation. The Program proposed in this Bill will connect soon-to-be returning citizens with others who have personal experience successfully transitioning through release and re-entry. The Program will provide simple yet important assistance for returning citizens to help ensure a smooth transition back into the community.

Many incarcerated individuals—especially those who have served sentences that may span several decades—can struggle upon release without a strong support system. As public defenders, we see the practical challenges that returning citizens must navigate, oftentimes on their own, that can feel insurmountable. Having a support network prior to and upon release is an easy step that helps set up returning citizens for success. Receiving support and assistance from formerly incarcerated people is all the more meaningful, as these individuals can speak to their lived experiences upon release and offer advice and insight that other supporters cannot.

Notably, studies have shown that peer mentorship and support upon release can contribute to reduced recidivism.<sup>1</sup> The invaluable insight that formerly incarcerated individuals can offer is based on unique expertise and experience. By codifying these programs, we can ensure that such

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<sup>1</sup> See Dave Sells et. al., “Peer-Mentored Community Reentry Reduces Recidivism,” *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, Vol. 47 (4), p. 437-56 (2020), available at <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/peer-mentored-community-reentry-reduces-recidivism>.

expertise and mentorship is offered on a consistent basis, providing stability in programming opportunities for soon-to-be returning citizens across the State.

**For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on SB061.**

**Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division**  
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